

“The Arab Spring” And Its Socio-Political and Economic Effects on North African Countries

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Abstract: This article analyzes the essence of the political, socio-economic processes taking place in the countries of North Africa, and the issues of influence on the internal and external policies of the countries of the region.

Keywords: political factor, jamahiriya, Middle East, North Africa, the “Arab Spring”, political processes, global powers, social problems.

Introduction

The first wave of mass protests in North Africa and the Middle East began in December 2010 in Tunisia and Algeria. According to Russian researcher N.A. Komleva, “The Arab Spring is commonly referred to as a set of political changes in explosive temper that took place in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East, mainly in the spring of 2011” [1]. Indeed, the “Arab Spring” protests were acts of resistance to a complex internal situation, however, there were also external causes and consequences.

Social and religious movements resulted in the collapse of the regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, changes in the ruling elite in Yemen and the ongoing conflict between the official government and opposition in Syria. While the demonstrations against the regimes in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen were based on internal factors such as socio-economic crisis, corrupt ruling elite, the absence of real democratic freedoms, ethno-confessional conflicts, the decisive factor was the external support of opposition forces (in addition to the problems mentioned above) in Libya and Syria [2]. These events spread through the Arab world except Somalia, Mauritania and the Comoros, bringing updates in their political systems and structures, along with a change in the further political fate of the Arab states.

Discussion

The “Arab Spring” influenced the countries of North Africa and the Middle East differently. We can divide the countries into two groups: The first group includes Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, and Syria, where the socio-political shocks of the so-called “Arab Spring” had deep impacts on the nature of the political processes. The second group includes Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, Algeria, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Oman, which were only partially affected by “Arab Spring” [3]. In the states of the first group mentioned above, the “wave of democratization” led to the overthrow of political regimes, including Ben Ali regime in Tunisia, Mubarak regime in Egypt and Gaddafi regime in Libya.

In this context, conflicts between elites inside the country of Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya are crucial. In the case of Tunisia confrontation between army and special services played a decisive role, while President Ben Ali relied on special services, the army and military forces did not support the government in suppressing riots in the country. The fact that the number of personnel operating in the Tunisian special services was 4 times higher than the number of people in the army caused the military leaders seeking power to support the demonstrators during uprisings.

Also, in Egypt the conflict between the military leadership of the army and Jamal Mubarak, the eldest son of President Hosni Mubarak, escalated from the moment Jamal Mubarak expressed his intention to run for President. Due to the fact that Jamal Mubarak was had no strong relations with the army, the military, which had been in power since the 1952 revolution [4], did not support him to come to power [5]. This disagreement led to a rivalry between the military leadership and Jamal Mubarak’s supporters based in parliament and the government.

The situation in political processes in Libya repeated the above two cases. While disputes within the elite in Tunisia and Egypt took place a bit smoothly, disputes in Libya were mixed with tribal conflicts.

Previously opposed to each other, the Tripolitan and Cyrenaican tribes did not accept Tripolitanian based Muammar Gaddafi's 42-year rule over the country. The situation in Libya worsened for the reason that the richest territories with oil reserves are located in the East, Cyrenakia. The revolutionary leader Muammar Gaddafi united the tribes of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fessana under the "jamahiriya" ideology against an external enemy. But the regime, which has persisted without reforms for decades, turned out to be incapable. Libyan regime fell at a very rapid pace, all state structures began to fall into the hands of rebels one after another. By the spring of 2011 Gaddafi's regime was only supported by his fellow tribesmen.

The governments could develop their immunity, despite strong socio-political shocks in Algeria, Lebanon, and Sudan. Protests in these states only made a recurring form tone from time to time, governments got used to modern realities, without changes in the political system. For example, socio-political protests in Algeria were based on socio-economic problems. These demonstrations were associated with an increase in the price of products in the country, and not connected with the events in the neighboring Tunisia and Egypt. In the demonstrations in January 2011, the protesters were not connected by political demands, but by social problems such as unemployment, increased prices, low wages, high inflation rates, and rising taxes. Therefore, in the first month of protests, the Algerian government began to solve economic problems.

During the "Arab Spring", suicide by self-immolation were the cases in Tunisia (M. Buazizi), Egypt (A. Munim Kamal), and Yemen (F. Sultan) where socio-economic demands were raised from the very beginning. And in countries where the protests were held with political demands, there were no self-immolation cases.

However, the process of socio-political transformation had an influence on other countries in the region. For example, Algerian opposition forces began to impose political demands, encouraged by riots in Egypt. But the main reason for the persistence of the current political regime in Algeria, unlike the neighboring countries, was that the president Abdelaziz Bouteflika had not been in power for a very long time. Secondly, the Algerian society went through the war in the 1990s, and stability was important for society, not radical changes. Third and more important aspect is that Islamist parties had played a key role in Algerian political life.

We can conditionally divide the population in the Arab states of North Africa into 4 social groups. The first group includes representatives of political power, means the president and those around him, the second group is the military forces which maintain the order and peace in the country. The third one is a group of people highly influenced by European culture and the fourth one is the lower class with conservative views. In Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria, where color revolutions took place, the most important class that ensured political power and the security of the president was, of course, the second layer – the military. This was a structure that should suppress any public uprising or mass unrest, and the role of the military in politics had been critically crucial in the modern history of Arab states. But as a result of the corruption in most Arab countries, the external influence on the military was easy to impose, which means that the income from corruption had to be kept and hidden outside the country in offshore companies.

Considering that all offshore companies and international banks are located in the West, it can be argued that the data is easily used against the owners. The opposition in the countries of the region also sought help from overseas structures in the military resistance. Instead of defending the reigning regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, and fighting against the opposition, the military joined the riots against the ruling authorities. It indicates that the above-mentioned open reasons are associated with hidden ones.

Similar connection can be observed in the actions of the "Muslim Brotherhood". Through the Internet and social networks, Egyptian people were mobilized mostly. But it was difficult for such modern technologies to influence the conservative class of the country and it was time for other mechanisms to be used. The "Muslim Brotherhood" began to call on the most conservative people against the Mubarak regime. The demonstrations followed by the overthrow of the Mubarak regime and the fundamentalist-minded "Muslim Brotherhood" came to power replacing the secular government.

When it comes to the Egyptian political future, the question of its internal stability and the integrity of society matter. One of the main elements of the integrity of society is the formation of civil government. But in Egypt, no group struggling for power is willing to raise this question. Free democratic elections could also be the first step towards Egyptian democratization. However, the real situation shows that only authoritarian or military leaders or both authoritarian and military leaders can be in power.

The map of modern North Africa shows that the military, coming to power in Egypt, gets always used to hold their power. E. Satanovsky noted that “in Egypt, the Algerian scenario can be repeated”. According to him, the Islamist governments that came to power by overthrowing the military in the neighboring country can help Islamist groups in Egypt.

The economic situation of the country is also poor. Egypt is increasingly becoming dependent on external aid and intervention. Out of 36 billion USD gold and currency reserves of the country cumulated during Mubarak’s reign, 21 billion USD have been wasted during revolutions. Without large financial investments in the Egyptian economy, it is impossible to solve the problem. But, Egypt’s 80 million population can not be provided by either the United States or Saudi Arabia.

The transformations that the North African states have undergone and are going through have produced different changes depending on the peculiarities of each state, that is, what stage of national and state construction these states are going through:

- the process of democratization – emergence of new elements in the political systems of countries such as Tunisia and Egypt, the overthrow of the ruling regimes and the introduction of constitutional changes;
- the process of accelerating Liberal democratic reforms – the implementation of reforms without extreme shocks for countries such as Morocco and Jordan and other Republican systems, but with practical results;

- slow liberalization process - introduction of liberalization elements while maintaining the current power in the Persian Gulf monarchies;

- the process of political disorder (disintegration) or semi-disorder (semi-disintegration) is a period of escalation of the situation in countries such as Libya, Yemen, and Syria and uncertainty in determining the political future of the country. The balance of forces that the regional (Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran) and the global powers (Russia, China, the United States) form in the region played an important role in determining the political future of these countries during this period.

Any change in the socio-political situation in any state directly affects neighboring countries in the region. The recent changes in the Middle East and North Africa have created a more complicated and interconnected situation, leading to a change in the balance of security and stability not only in neighboring regions but also in the world.

Conclusions

Based on the above analyzes, it is worth noting as a conclusion that, firstly, conflicts cause continuous unstable situation in Africa. The factors that generate conflicts are different, among which the economic-social backwardness on the continent plays a crucial role (the main dominant one). With the low rate of economic growth which is common the majority of African countries, the slow development process can be maintained for a long time. This further complicates the situation on the continent, increasingly entangling the solution to the conflicts. In order to prevent problems from becoming global and spreading on a large scale, it is necessary to resolve disputes internationally. This also depends on that the world’s leading powers act in cooperation to achieve a single goal.

Second, the foundations of socio-political situations in the region have been developing in the last decade in the form of internal conflicts of the states of the region, interstate political, economic war and armed disputes, inter-confessional, interclan, interethnic, religious-ethnic contradictions. This trend remains. The last of these trends can be observed in the “Arab Spring”, the confrontation between local tribes in Libya, the problem of terrorist and extremist forces in North and East Africa and they are the main concerns for the global community.

Third, and the hidden reasons that gave rise to the transformation of the political regimes of African Arab countries, in particular Tunisia and Egypt, are associated with the ideas of democratization of the region. The issues of democratization in this region were viewed by foreign players such as NATO, the EU, and the USA as one of the directions of their foreign policy priority. Hence the democratization of the region became difficult due to the resistance in the countries controlled by strong authoritarian regimes.

Fourth, it is difficult for Egypt to establish a border as strong as before for illegal immigrants from Tunisia and Libya. Illegal immigrants from African countries can become a major problem for European and

Persian Gulf monarchies with high standards of living. This situation can further entangle Egypt's difficult relations with European countries, as well as with the countries of the Persian Gulf.

Fifth, in the Middle East, not only the United States but also Russia is involved in the division of new spheres of influence. While the situation that was formed in the region secured Russia's minimal participation in this region, however the change in the situation today, in particular, the multi-vector direction in which Egyptian foreign policy is being formed, creates opportunities for Russia to stay in the region.

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